

PUDDLE JUMPING



Kids jump into puddles and teenagers prefer to drive through them; both do it with wild abandonment. Grown-ups jump over them. It's such fun! The art of staying dry makes a good ABLE Bodies balance practice activity.

Puddle Jumping requires a plan. It also requires greater step height and length. Participants must commit to the forward move. They need to initiate the movement with a big knee lift and follow through (as in Belly Button Training). They will land best if they use a heel-toe motion. Coming to a stop after a big step means they'll need to explore how to stop forward momentum of their center of gravity. Have fun with this activity; it may become a productive favorite.

Benefits »

- ⊙ Increases step length and height.
- ⊙ Practices momentum control.
- ⊙ Requires a cognitive plan.
- ⊙ Develops transferable skill for everyday life in a fun, easily adaptable activity.

Set It Up »

You will need some targets to be imaginary pieces of dry ground; masking tape or agility dots work best. Agility dots, available from fitness equipment stores and Web sites, are preferable because you can easily move them to suit participants. Some dots also have nonskid features on one side. They would be safest to use. Do not use paper dots or other materials that may slip out from under participants' feet. Practice with the materials yourself so you can be sure the targets do not skid.

Near a handrail, put out some agility dots in a stepping pattern. Place them at distances apart that you know they can do. After a few passes, you can increase the distance between them. Here are four basic patterns:

- ⊙ Offset, in a left-right walking pattern, similar to stepping stones
- ⊙ Straight line
- ⊙ Curve or figure eight
- ⊙ Random (straight, offset, changing distances and shapes)

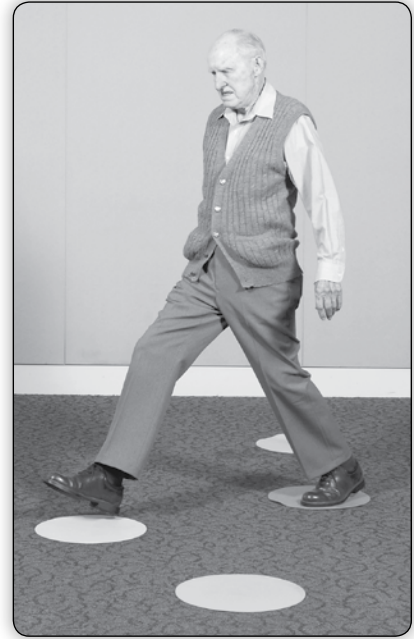
How to Do It »

Practice the Stepping Motion

- ⊙ Participants practice beside their chairs, first.
- ⊙ Provide them the opportunity to check out the difference that knee height makes to step length.
 - Knee lift and start step.
 - Move to forward position, land heel-toe.
 - Bring up the back leg beside the other. Safe landing!
 - Repeat a few times (use various knee heights).
- ⊙ Once they move away from the chairs, your close supervision or taking turns is necessary.

Puddle Jumps

- ⦿ Start with the puddles set up by a handrail.
- ⦿ Taking turns, participants take big steps across the dot pattern, one dot at a time.
- ⦿ Stay nearby so you can help as needed.
- ⦿ Use the following cues.
 - Stand with both feet on one dot.
 - Target the dot on which you plan to land.
 - Make a plan that will get you there. (They should be thinking of what techniques they can use.)
 - Knee lift—get good height for the greatest distance!
 - Step out to the targeted dot.
 - Follow the foot forward with your torso (as in Belly Button Training).
 - Land heel-toe.
 - Bring the other foot beside the forward foot.
 - Stop and settle (abs in and ribs lifted helps; as does When Push Comes to Shove).
 - Look for the next dot and make a plan.



Give It More Balance »

- ⦿ Hold their hands instead of having them use handrail.
- ⦿ Can they jump puddles on their own? (Set dots away from handrails. Still have them take turns. You stay close for safety.).
- ⦿ Use more difficult patterns or distances.
- ⦿ Dim the lights.
- ⦿ Combine with another task, like singing a nursery rhyme.
- ⦿ Use this concept in other activities; for example, add puddle-jumping dots to the River Fun games.

Keep It Safe »

Use nonskid materials as stepping targets. Test them ahead of time on your floors. Stay nearby. Encourage participants to plan ahead for their challenge.

Live It »

Balance training should be imaginative, fun, and as engaging as possible. This activity carries over to real-life situations. Big knee lifts and following the traveling foot will help carry participants over the great divides of life.